

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4586

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 1187

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AR

SUBJECT: CHURCH REACTION TO POLITICAL CRISIS

1. SUMMARY. AS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DISCUSSION OF A POSSIBLE COUP CIRCULATE WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY, EMBASSY IS GETTING INDICATIONS THAT THE CHURCH HIERARCHY IS MAKING PLANS TO DEFINE ITS POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY.

2. AT RECENT DINNER AT EGYPTIAN EMBASSY THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR PRODDING THE PAPAL NUNCIO FOR HIS PERSONAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHURCH'S POSITION REGARDING A POSSIBLE GOLPE. THOUGH AT FIRST HESITANT TO GIVE HIS RESPONSE, THE NUNCIO AFTER PRODDING TOLD THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR THAT HE PERSONALLY WAS AGAINST A GOLPE AND FAVORED A CIVILIAN SOLUTION. WHILE HE DID NOT CLAIM TO SPEAK FOR THE LOCAL HIERARCHY, THE NUNCIO LEFT THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT MANY LOCAL CHURCHMEN HARBORED SERIOUS RESERVATIONS ABOUT A GOLPE. THIS CONVERSATION WITH THE NUNCIO WAS COMMUNICATED TO AMBASSADOR HILL BY THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR, WHO EVALUATED IT AS BEING SIGN THAT CHURCH WOULD FLATLY OPPOSE A MILITARY COUP.

3. ON FEBRUARY 19, AMBASSADOR HILL AND THREE EMBOFFS DISCUSSED CHURCH ROLE IN CURRENT CRISIS WITH CARLOS FLORIA, POLITICAL ANALYST WITH GOOD TIES TO THE
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HIERARCHY. FLORIA STATED THAT THE CHURCH IS PRESENTLY

PUTTING TOGETHER AN EPISCOPAL DOCUMENT THEY PLAN TO MAKE PUBLIC IN MID MARCH. THE DOCUMENT, WHICH WILL BE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE PRESENT ARGENTINE SITUATION, IS BEING DRAFTED IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE CRITICISMS IT MAKES WILL BE VALID WHETHER OR NOT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT REMAINS IN POWER. IF A GOLPE OCCURS, THIS DOCUMENT COULD BE USED BY THE CHURCH AS DEFINING ITS EXPECTATIONS FOR THE BEHAVIOR OF A MILITARY GOVERNMENT. DILEMMA FOR CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION IS THAT WHILE IT SEES PRESENT GOVERNMENT AS HAVING A CORROSIVE IMPACT ON MORALS OF ALL ARGENTINES, IT WANTS TO STATE ITS DISTASTE IN SUCH A WAY AS TO NOT BE CONSIDERED ANTI-PERONIST. PROBLEM IS PARTICULARLY ACUTE WITH REFERENCE TO LABOR UNIONS, WHOSE LEADERS THE CHURCH SEES AS IMMORAL, CORRUPT AND DEGENERATE FIGURES WHO ARE UNDERMINING THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL VALUES OF THE WORKING CLASS. CHURCH HOPES THAT IN ITS DOCUMENT IT WILL BE ABLE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN ITS ABHORRENCE OF CORRUPT LEADERS AND ITS CONCERN FOR THE WELL BEING OF THE ARGENTINE WORKERS.

4. WITH REFERENCE TO NUNCIO'S STATEMENT AND CHURCH ATTITUDE TOWARD A GOLPE, FLORIA, WHO RECENTLY HAD LONG TALK WITH NUNCIO, BELIEVES NUNCIO VIEWS CONDITIONED BY HIS LACK OF EXPERIENCE WITH POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN WHICH GOLPES OCCUR. NOT ABLE TO FORESEE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GOLPE, HE HAS THUS TAKEN A POSITION IN OPPOSITION TO A MILITARY COUP. THIS, HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO FLORIA, IS NOT THE POSITION OF THE ARGENTINE HIERARCHY WHO, WHILE CONCERNED ABOUT SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES A GOLPE MIGHT BRING, ARE MORE CONCERNED THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, IF ALLOWED TO REMAIN ON ITS PRESENT COURSE, WILL COMPLETELY CORRUPT THE ARGENTINE SOCIETY. TO FORESTALL WHAT THE CHURCH SEES AS POTENTIAL EXCESSES OF A MILITARY GOVERNMENT, ITS "WHITE PAPER" WILL AFFIRM THE POSITION THAT THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY IS TO PROTECT THE WEAK. IT IS THE CHURCH'S HOPE THAT THE MILITARY WILL UNDERSTAND THAT THEY SHOULD TEMPER THEIR ACTIONS AGAINST THEIR OPPONENTS WHEN IT INVOLVES WORKERS PER SE WHO BEAR NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE EXCESSES OF THE UNION LEADERSHIP.

5. COMMENT: THE FACT THAT CHURCH HIERARCHY NOW SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING ITS POSITION BOTH WITH REGARD TO PRESENT GOVERN-
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MENT AND FUTURE POTENTIAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT IS INDICATION OF CHURCH'S EVALUATION OF GRAVITY OF THIS PHASE OF CRISIS.
HILL

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